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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000323

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SUBJECT: Even More Arrests and Many Convictions Follow Elections

Ref: A) Minsk 292 B) Minsk 307 C) Minsk 319

1. Summary: From March 21 to March 23, human rights activists and independent press reported that more people have been arrested and several dozens have already been sentenced for participating in demonstrations following the March 19 presidential elections. Anatoly Lebedko, deputy to Milinkevich and leader of the United Civic Party received 15 days in jail, while his deputy Aleksandr Dobrovolsky was sentenced to nine days. Former presidential candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich's deputy campaign manager Aleksandr Koneyenko was severely beaten by two unknown men on March 23 as he left his home. Approximately 60 Belarusians were detained trying to bring supplies to those who were already in jail for participating in unsanctioned demonstrations, while 12 demonstrators in Vitebsk were arrested and sentenced to jail for conducting a protest. Similarly, foreign nationals, including a member of the Polish Sjem, have been detained, tried and/or deported. End summary.

10-15 Days in Jail for Participating in a Demonstration

2. Independent media source Belapan reported that dozens of activists who were arrested on the night between March 20 and March 21 for participating in the demonstrations on October Square stood trial on March 22. The overwhelming majority of the activists received prison sentences of 10-15 days under the Administrative Code. According to human rights activist Tatiana Ravyaka, United Civic Party Leader Anatoly Lebedko was jailed for 15 days for participating in an unsanctioned meeting (ref B). [Note: Lebedko is still waiting for sentencing on his previous hooliganism charge.] Ravyaka also reported that UCP deputy Anatoly Dobrovolsky received nine days in jail, while Belarusian Popular Front leader Aleksei Yanukevich was jailed for 12 days, and former Belarusian State Economic University student Tatiana Khoma was sentenced to 10 days for participating in an unsanctioned meeting (ref B). Ravyaka noted that the court could not try all the cases on March 22, and the detainees whose cases were still pending remained overnight at the Okrestina detention center. Human rights activist Valentin Stefanovich said that reporters, relatives and lawyers were not allowed to attend the trials in the House of Justice.

3. Belapan reported that on March 22, Sovetskiy District Court Judge Alyona Kraichyk sentenced editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper "Nasha Niva" to 10 days in jail for petty hooliganism when he allegedly refused to stop uttering obscenities after being warned several times by police. Dynko was carrying food to the protesters when he was arrested. On the same day, independent newspaper "Belorussiy i Rynok" journalist Vadim Aleksandrovich was sentenced to 10 days in jail for taking part in an unauthorized rally. On March 21, Belapan also reported that journalist Olga Demchenko was fined BYR 620,000 [USD 290].

4. Legal expert and human rights activist Vladimir Labkovich told Poloff on March 21 that police arrested approximately 60 people who were bringing food and warm clothes to those detained in prison. The 60 people were brought to the courthouse en masse on buses to stand trial later on March 21.

Several Dozens More Detained, Beaten, and Arrested

5. On March 23, Milinkevich's deputy campaign manager Viktor Korneyenko told journalists he was severely beaten as he left his home that morning. Two unknown men approached him outside his home, started to beat him in the head with a stick and then proceeded to kick Korneyenko once he fell to the ground. Korneyenko is convinced the attack is related to his participation in the opposition protest on October Square.

6. Belapan reported that more than 100 people were arrested from March 20 to March 21 and about 50 people were arrested the following night as they were leaving October Square. Conservative Christian Party secretary Ales Cekholsky said that many of those who were arrested were severely beaten, including Mikhail Avdeyev who was allegedly attacked by a policeman as he entered the subway station. Separately on March 22 RFE/RL reported that police detained and beat October Square demonstrator Mikhail Audzeyeu while he was trying to get home to change his clothes.

7. Independent media also reported that deputy Okyarbsky district police chief arrested 12 demonstrators on March 21 in Vitebsk - and

allegedly used force on four of them - 15 minutes after the start of a rally. Among those detained were Milinkevich regional

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headquarters leader Khristofer Zhelyapov, Vitebsky Kuryer reporter Sergei Serebro and Belarusian Popular Front activist Vladislav Tokarev. Most of the activists were held overnight and independent media reported on March 23 that Zhelyapov received 10 days of administrative arrest for participating in an unsanctioned rally. Other activists received five-day sentences or fines.

18. Zubr activist Nikita Sasim, who is currently being held by police under charges of draft evasion, was transferred from a hospital to the Baranovichi temporary detention center. Human rights NGO Charter97 indicated that Sasim was in the hospital recovering from his recent surgery to have his appendix removed.

Foreigners Detained and Deported for Supporting Demonstrations

19. Belapan reported that Polish Sejm member Jaroslaw Jagiello was arrested on March 21 for participating in the October Square demonstrations. The Polish Embassy reported that he stood trial on March 22. Georgian media reported that three Georgian nationals - two clergymen Malkhaz Songulashvili and Basily Kobakhidze and one religious studies scholar Lado Gogiashvili - were deported from Belarus on March 22 and banned from re-entry for five years after they were arrested on Monday for participating in the March 19 demonstration on October Square (ref B). In addition, Vyasna human rights activist Valentin Stefanovich reported that on March 21 Judge Aleksei Bychko of the Tsentralny District Court sentenced three Russian citizens to ten days in jail for petty hooliganism.

Comment

10. Although the authorities have allowed the demonstrations on October Square to continue, the mass arrests of activists, usually away from the Square and thus out of the sight of foreign journalists and observers, indicate that the GOB remains committed to breaking the resolve and spirit of the protesters. Coupled with the opposition's lack of coordination, organization and preparedness (ref C), these mass arrests will most likely have a crippling effect on the opposition's ability to sustain momentum.

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